

**THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11:
HELPING OURSELVES –
HELPING OUR CHILDREN**

Informal Child Care Providers Workshop

**March 2, 2002
New York City, NY**

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On September 11, 2001, three blocks from the World Trade Center, a little girl left her child care center with her teacher to reunite with her mother. Stepping out onto the sidewalk, as her eyes, ears, and nose took in the gray air and ankle-deep debris, the amazed child exclaimed for all of us, “What happened to the world?” The teacher could offer no answer other than “You’re safe with us. Let’s go find your Mom.” And that is just what they did.

What are we to answer?

(From: “*What Happened to the World, Helping Children Cope in Turbulent Times*,”: Jim Greenman, Bright Horizons Family Solutions, 2001.)

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WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Event: **The Aftermath of 9/11:
Helping Ourselves – Helping Our Children**

 Informal Child Care Providers Workshop

Date: **March 2, 2002**

Location: **Doubletree Hotel, New York City**

1. OVERVIEW

The Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families Region II Office and the New York City Human Resources Administration co-sponsored this event. The purpose of the workshop was to present child care providers with additional skills on how to handle questions and issues relative to young children who may have been traumatized by events such as what occurred on September 11, 2001. The one-day training session, developed on short notice, was specifically designed for family day care providers who care for small numbers of children. Ms. Martha Becker, a psychologist, and Ms. Fern Estrow, a nutritionist, served as co-presenters for the workshop. Participants who attended included child care specialists and professionals, family day care providers, and key administrative staff. Approximately one hundred seventeen family day care providers from the boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx, and Queens were present.

2. BACKGROUND

In the aftermath of the tragedy on 9/11/01, the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families in partnership with the New York City Human Resources Administration decided to convene a one-day workshop to assist TANF children and families who were negatively affected by the disaster. Both agencies felt that dealing with the fear, loss, grief, and trauma that children, parents, and caretakers have been subjected to, and will continue to experience in the foreseeable future, is a vital and valuable function of the TANF agencies.

This workshop was specifically targeted for attendees who represented informal child care providers who are engaged in providing needed day care services for TANF families. In general, informal child care providers are those who care for fewer numbers of children, usually in their own homes, and are not required to hold a child care license. The New York City Human Resources Administration has already conducted a workshop similar to this one for licensed day care providers.

The enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996 provided States with the opportunity and flexibility to develop Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs with the overall goal of assisting families to achieve self-sufficiency. The fourth purpose of the TANF program outlined in the 1996 legislation is to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. This workshop supports this fourth TANF purpose by offering an opportunity for parents and caretakers to improve parenting skills and to acquire crisis and intervention services.

3. WELCOME COMMENTS

On behalf the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families and the New York City Human Resources Administration, the following are highlights from representatives from both agencies as well as the workshop's co-presenters.

Dennis Minkler, Program Manager, Self-Sufficiency Programs, Region II Administration for Children and Families

Mr. Minkler welcomed the participants and thanked them for taking the time to participate in the workshop on a Saturday. He reflected that the regional office felt a need for this workshop on behalf of the city's child care providers and parents as a result of the events of 9/11/01. He went on to comment that although the workshop was put together in a short period of time and on short notice, he thanked the workshop's participants for their support and involvement. He also emphasized that the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, Child Care Bureau is available to provide parents and caretakers with additional assistance. He referred participants to its resource table for further information. Its Web site can be found at www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb.

Babatunde Oke, Program Manager, New York City Human Resources Administration

Mr. Oke also offered his words of welcome to the group and added that he was especially thankful that so many participants were in attendance. He went on to say that this workshop provided him a unique personal opportunity to actually meet so many people he had only previously talked to on the phone. He emphasized that the needs of children is a top priority among his agency. He stressed that the tools and techniques that will be covered during the workshop will be extremely helpful to those who are caring for children in today's world. Mr. Oke closed by reflecting that he appreciated the support the Administration for Children and Families has provided to his agency in hosting this very important workshop.

Workshop Co-Presenters:

Martha Becker, MPA, MEd, Certified School Psychologist

Martha Becker is a management and clinical consultant in the health, education and human services field. She provides services to programs that specialize in children and family services, including program development, staff training, curriculum design, and stress management. Ms. Becker is the founder of Management Development Plus, a New York City-based consulting firm.

Fern Estrow, MS, RD, CDN, Certified Dietitian—Nutritionist

Fern Estrow is a nutrition and foodservice consultant specializing in safety and diversity curriculums, staff development and services for at risk populations. Her current clients include New York City agencies, educational institutions, and associations.

Ms. Becker and Ms. Estrow welcomed workshop participants and opened their remarks by offering their own stories of how they were personally affected by the events of 9/11. Ms. Becker reminded the participants that the workshop was designed to help *them* deal with the stress of 9/11 as well as the children under their care.

Ms. Estrow went on to pose the question: “Why are we here?” She offered a few of the following answers: to share feelings, questions and concerns surrounding the traumatic events of 9/11, terrorism and war, but also to discuss how to respond to children’s questions and reactions, and to share resources for help. The goal of the day, she said, was to provide participants with the techniques that facilitate the development of effective coping skills in children.

The workshop had three overall objectives that both presenters hoped participants would achieve. Ms. Estrow went on to say that by the end of the workshop, she and Ms. Becker anticipated that participants would:

- Understand the influence of their own reactions on the children in their care
- Understand the typical repertoire of children’s responses to trauma
- Learn ways to address the needs of children in response to the trauma of 9/11

Next, Ms. Estrow outlined some of the major themes that would be discussed during the workshop. These included:

- understanding how children respond to stress while considering individual differences (such as age, past experiences, etc.);
- identifying when professional intervention is needed;
- identifying what children need from adults;
- the need for adults to care for themselves; and
- to learn effective stress management techniques that promote healthy lifestyles.

4. UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS TO 9/11

Ms. Becker asked the participants to break into small groups in order to discuss the following short activity: to indicate in one word how they felt *personally* on 9/11 in response to events that were unfolding as the day progressed. Returning from the small groups, Ms. Estrow facilitated a discussion by asking a few of the participants to share their personal stories as related to the words they chose. Some of the responses included: scared, shocked, afraid, horrified, worried, vengeful and disbelief. All participants agreed that doing the exercise brought back both the feelings and experience of that day in September.

Ms. Estrow outlined the common emotional reactions and behavioral changes in adults and older children as shown in the table below:

Adults and Older Children	
Common Emotional Reactions	Common Changes in Behavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shock• Guilt• Consuming Fear• Helplessness• Sadness/Anger• Alienation/Isolation• Anxiety/Worry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Altered Sleeping Patterns• Increased/decreased appetite• Fatigue• Confusion/Indecision• Anxious Behavior• Crying• Short Temper• Headaches/Other Minor Ailments

5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADULT AND CHILD REACTIONS TO STRESS

In introducing the topic of how children typically respond to stress, Ms. Becker asked the question: “How did children in your care respond the events of 9/11?” Many participants replied by describing the questions that children asked them on 9/11 as the traumatic event was unfolding. A two-year old asked: “Why did the plane crash into the building?” A ten-year old kept looking outside at tall buildings and was looking out for low flying planes.

Ms. Estrow explained that given the individual differences of the influence of age, developmental level, and past experiences, children will react differently. Children under the age of three can only express their reactions through the language of behavior. They may sense that something is different, but are not sure what it is. Preschool children may not understand the traumatic event, but will act out their feelings through play. One participant asked if children should be able to play the villain when roleplay acting. Ms. Estrow answered that acting out anger and violent play is okay. She went on to say that

this kind of play often serves as therapy for preschoolers, and it is fine as long as they are not hurting themselves or others. She also pointed out that preschoolers want to help and that encouraging them to volunteer is an excellent response. School age children may show more aggressive behavior and have problems concentrating. Often they are interested in rules, structure, and the difference between right and wrong. High school students may act indifferent and complain more about minor ailments. Already coping with the changes of adolescence, teenagers are more likely to become depressed, think about their future, and possibly experience a change in their performance at school.

The following table summarizes the typical responses of children according to age:

Children's Responses to Stress According to Age				
Age	Under 3	Preschool	School Age	Jr. or Sr. High School
Response	Altered eating or sleeping Cry more than usual Clingy	Play out events Regress to younger behavior Have nightmares and difficulty sleeping	Express curiosity about the details Become clingy and whiny	Experience appetite and sleep changes Show increase or decrease in energy Refuse to be cooperative

6. HOW TO IDENTIFY WHEN PROFESSIONAL HELP IS NEEDED

Ms. Becker went on and asked the participants: "How do you know when professional help is needed?" She reflected that during such tragic and traumatic events most everyone will experience or go through some changes as they react to what has happened. Most of the time, however, these symptoms will begin to disappear as the child and family begin to re-adjust. Ms. Becker explained that there are a few signals that may suggest when professional help is needed:

- The intensity or extent to which a change in behavior or mood is interfering with daily functioning
- A prolonged period of time in which children exhibit marked changes in behavior/mood/communication

Ms. Becker stressed that the more that parents and child care providers learn about the typical reactions and behavioral changes, the better able they will be to identify warning signs that children may need professional intervention.

7. WHAT CHILDREN NEED FROM PARENTS AND CARETAKERS TO HELP THEM UNDERSTAND 9/11 AND COPE

Until a crisis, most children and adults do not spend much time pondering issues about life and death, war, fear, or terrorism. However, in response to the traumatic events of 9/11, parents, teachers and caretakers will be asked more of them as leaders to help children understand and work through their feelings and questions on these tough issues.

Ms. Becker explained that parents and caretakers should not lie when confronted with questions, which may at times, test our political and social views. Answering questions with age-appropriate, factual information is necessary, as well as minimizing children's exposure to the media, news, and images of violence.

Ms. Becker and Ms. Estrow broke the participants into small groups for a small group activity and asked them to consider the question: "What do children need from us as adults?" Some of the responses from the activity included:

- More patience, support, affection, communication
- Opportunities to express themselves, continuance of daily routine
- Reassurance, trust, understanding

Discussing the responses with Ms. Becker after the activity was completed, the participants agreed that today's children will be looking more frequently to adults for leadership and direction. She emphasized that children need to know that they are safe. They also need more opportunities to express themselves and discuss their feelings. She stressed that adults should take more time out to listen to children in today's troubled times.

Children under the age of three need normal routines, favorite rituals, and a lot of time with strong, loving, reassuring adults Ms. Becker pointed out. She went on to say that children between the ages of three and five need verbal assurances that parents and caretakers, as well as themselves, will be okay, opportunities for gentle conversation, and time to express themselves – through art or play.

Ms. Becker explained that adults' needs are very similar to those of children. She continued, explaining that when adults are talking about events and reacting, children often hear their conversations. She suggested that parents and child care providers should be reminded to be mindful of what they say around children. They should be aware of emotions they display, such as fear or anxiety, as well as comments they make regarding the news or other daily events.

8. TECHNIQUES FOR CARETAKERS TO USE TO HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP COPING SKILLS

Ms. Estrow offered a number of helpful techniques and tools for caretakers to use.

Some of her suggestions included:

- Provide books at the appropriate level on fear
- Encourage play and art representing feeling and thoughts
- Create projects based on their interests and concerns
- Help children get involved with relief efforts

Ms. Estrow said that caretakers need to show empathy and patience to help children better understand 9/11. She stressed the importance of having children share their feelings and answering their questions with age appropriate, factual information. It is also important, she said, to be strong and to offer reassurances. From saying, “A lot strong, smart people are working hard to keep us safe,” to sharing hugs that say, “I’m here for you,” help the child get the response that he or she needs. The main focus, she went on, should be to encourage the child that he or she is safe.

To generate a discussion on techniques for caretakers, the co-presenters asked questions to the group of participants. They asked questions such as, “What are kids doing during playtime?” or “Has their play changed since 9/11?” and “What have you noticed about the children’s behavior recently?” One participant commented that the children were asking a lot of questions such as, “What if a plane hits our building?” and “How should I respond?” Several workshop participants asked how they should respond to these types of questions. Ms. Becker replied by asking other participants to share about the types of responses they have been using with the children under their care. One person said that she tells her children, “God is watching over us.” Most importantly, she stressed, is for the provider to give age appropriate answers to the questions but not to give more information than is needed. Another participant asked, “What if a child is not sleeping?” Again, Ms. Becker solicited suggestions from the group. One person suggested that playing music, reading a story before bedtime, or warm milk before bed might help. One of the last questions asked was how to respond to children who have fathers (or mothers) deployed overseas in the military. Ms. Becker responded by suggesting that the adult answer this question by telling the child that his/her father/mother is protecting us at home, which may offer some comfort.

Next, volunteers were selected from the audience to participate in a role play application exercise. The purpose of the exercise was to allow participants an opportunity to practice using the techniques discussed for caretakers to use to help children develop coping skills. Participants were offered a choice of scenarios that were examples of common situations occurring with children today. The volunteers were assigned roles as children and as the adult caretaker. All other workshop participants acted as observers and provided feedback to the volunteers.

In one skit the “adult caretaker” (workshop participant volunteer) was challenged with responding to several children who were reluctant to participate in a field trip to a local firehouse. One “child” in the roleplay was afraid to go because she felt that all firefighters die and that the fire station was a sad place. Another child said he had an acquaintance who was killed while performing his duty as a fireman. The “adult caretaker” handled the

situation and was able to continue on with the field trip because he applied the techniques learned during the workshop. After the skit was completed, both presenters facilitated an interactive discussion in which the volunteers were provided feedback. In addition, participants were asked to expand on this situation and apply it to visiting the police station, tall buildings, and other locations/images related to 9/11.

In another roleplay scenario another adult volunteer was challenged with responding to handling a situation in which several children were dropped off for child care who lost a parent on 9/11. The “children” displayed many of the emotional and behavioral reactions that were discussed earlier in the workshop. Again, the “adult caretaker” responded using the techniques of observation (looking for age specific emotional and behavioral reactions), support (responding with age appropriate responses), and techniques (discussing grief, strong reassurances, and knowing when professional help is needed). One group of workshop participants asked the facilitators to stay after the conclusion of the workshop to discuss this scenario further.

Most importantly, the workshop facilitators stressed that parents and caretakers need to be able to identify children’s warning signs and be able to use the techniques covered during the workshop. However, they emphasized that the tools and techniques discussed were basic ones and not meant to replace professional help. Children experiencing serious grief, trauma, or stress should be referred for professional assistance. Both the facilitators and the workshop participants thought that parents and caretakers should focus on the positives that have resulted from 9/11, such as people coming together, praying more, and being thankful for the little things in life that are often overlooked.

9. TAKING CARE OF YOU

Finally, before helping others, adults also need to pay attention to themselves. Both facilitators stressed that children are not the only ones who need special care and attention in today’s times. As child care providers, parents, or teachers, shouldering the responsibility of the well-being of children can be stressful, and sometimes difficult – especially in the aftermath of a crisis. It is important that adults find the support and help they need, so they do not feel overwhelmed. The facilitators posed the question, “What should we do to take care of ourselves?” After a brief discussion with workshop participants they suggested their own ways for adults to take care of themselves. These included such basics as eat well, drink plenty of water, sleep, exercise, have fun, take time for an enjoyable hobby or activity, and learn stress management techniques. Other more specific suggestions related to 9/11 that they made included: limit increased attention to daily news and media, avoid letting children become caretakers for adults, and talk with other adults about feelings of fear, anxiety, stress, or grief. The participants had the opportunity to experience stress reduction exercises such as deep breathing and visualization.

10. FINAL REMARKS

Ms. Estrow shared some final thoughts with the participants about the aftermath of 9/11. She suggested that child care providers and adults should emphasize the positives of each situation, find the hope and goodness in all situations, learn about all the resources for coping with the tragedy available, and to be patient with ourselves and our children.

For those families who are experiencing financial loss because of the events of 9/11, she suggested that families seek assistance from their local human service agency. She also reminded participants of an earlier comment made by an ACF regional office staff member who pointed out that financial supports such as the tax relief the Federal government is offering to victims of 9/11, as well as other programs such as the IRS' Earned Income Credit (EIC), are available to low-income families.

Mr. Oke, from the New York City Human Resources Administration, followed Ms. Estrow's comments by reminding the participants that his agency is available to offer further assistance to parents or child care providers as a follow-up to the information provided in this workshop. His office also distributed child care provider kits containing basic care items to the workshop participants at the conclusion of the workshop.

At the end of the workshop, an evaluation was conducted to gather participant feedback about the day's workshop. Surveys to rate the usefulness of the activities and information presented were completed by participants. The majority of the participant feedback from the survey suggested that the day was highly successful – all participants indicated they learned valuable information and would use what they had learned in the future.

Finally, many participants also expressed the desire that future workshops be conducted entirely in Spanish. Two volunteers from the New York City Human Resources Administration translated the presentation as well as participants' responses during the workshop. This provided an opportunity for improved participation for those who attended the program, and an opportunity for the English-only speaking participants to benefit from their participation.

References for Additional Information

Web Sites on Children and Stress

“*What Happened to the World? Helping Children Cope in Turbulent Times*,” by Jim Greenman, <http://www.brighthorizons.com>

(With copyright permission, information in this booklet was widely used by the co-presenters of the workshop, and in the preparation of this summary report. Parents are encouraged to download the 64 page booklet.)

The Child Care Bureau, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services:

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb>

The National Institute of Mental Health provides information on helping children and adolescents cope with violence and disasters, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

Current information from KidsHealth on dealing with a terrorist tragedy, <http://www.kidshealth.org>

The American Psychiatric Association has a section on trauma, violence, and practical things that people can do to deal with reactions to trauma, <http://www.pysch.org>

Provides information about coping with family and child stress, with tips for reducing stress for everyone, <http://www.mctf.org/parents/tips/stress.html>

Provides links to a variety of web sites dealing with stress in adults and children, <http://www.siu.edu/departments/bushea/stress.html>

Books and Pamphlets

Parenting Through Crisis: Helping Kids in Times of Loss, Grief and Change, by Barbara Coloroso. NY: Harper Resource, 2000.

Children and Trauma: A Parent Guide to Helping Children Heal, by Cynthia Monahon. Lexington Books, 1995.

Talking with Your Child About a Troubled World, by Lynne Dumas. NY: Fawcett, 1992.

Helpful Web Sites

The mission of Educators for Social Responsibility is to make teaching social responsibility a core practice in education so that young people develop the convictions and skills needed to shape a safe, sustainable, democratic and just world, <http://www.esrnational.org>

From New York University Child Study Center, this Web site offers advice in helping children cope with the attack, <http://www.aboutourkids.org>

Resources for the tragedy from the Learning Network Parent Channel, <http://www.familyeducation.com>

“Coping With a National Tragedy,” from the National Association of School Psychologists, <http://www.nasponline.org>

“Helping Children Cope With Disaster,” from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, <http://www.naeyc.org>

Fred Rogers’ thoughts on “Helping Children Deal With Scary News,” <http://www.pbskiss.org/rogers/parents/sept11.html>

Advice for teachers and parents and a special news-zone for children: *Scholastic Magazine*, <http://www.scholastic.com>

Zero to Three is a project of the National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families. The web site offers advice for parents and professionals, <http://www.zerotothree.org>

Resources online for making a difference; designed to help people volunteer and find opportunities to give in their own communities and beyond, <http://www.helping.org>

Tips for teachers and schools to help children cope with tragic events, <http://www.childtrauma.org>

Talking with Kids: A national initiative by Children Now and the Kaiser Family Foundation to encourage parents to talk with their children earlier and more often about tough issues, <http://www.talkingwithkids.org>

“What To Tell Your Children About Prejudice and Discrimination” from the National PTA, a nonprofit association of parents, educators, and students, and other citizens active in their schools and communities, <http://www.pta.org>

Children’s site sponsored by the Peace Corps; a good resource for information about cultures around the world and how to make a difference, <http://www.peacecorps.gov/kids>

Main page of “Teaching Tolerance” a national education project dedicated to helping teachers foster equity, respect and understanding in the classroom and beyond, <http://www.splcenter.org>

Appendix A

WORKSHOP AGENDA



The Aftermath of 9/11: Helping Ourselves - Helping Our Children

Presented by:

Martha Becker, MPA, M.Ed, Certified School Psychologist

Fern Estrow, MS, RD, Certified Dietitian – Nutritionist

I. AGENDA

9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	Registration
9:30 a.m. - 9:40 a.m.	Introductions
9:40 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.	Understanding Emotional and Behavioral Reactions to 9/11
10:15 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.	The Relationship between Adult and Child Reactions to Stress
	How Children Typically Respond
	Individual Differences: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Influence of Age▪ Developmental Level, and▪ Past Experiences
11:15 a.m. - 11:20 a.m.	Stretch
11:20 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	How to Identify When professional help is Needed
11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	What Children Need from Parents and Caretakers To Help Them Understand 9/11 and Cope
12:15 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Techniques for Caretakers to Use to Help Children Develop Coping Skills
2:00 p.m. - 2:25 p.m.	Taking Care of You
2:25 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Closing

Appendix B

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT LIST



The Aftermath of 9/11: Helping Ourselves - Helping Our Children

PARTICIPANT LIST

March 2, 2002

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